May Theme 2022

Joy

“When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.” - Rumi

Joy is a unique element that gives texture and flavor to our life. It is a powerful and remarkable feeling that is rooted somewhere deep in our body’s Solar Plexus. Without it, we are left with closed off hearts and minds. Joy is something we all need to learn how to find, grow and share.

Some confuse success and achievement as being a direct path to joy; something to be sought out and conquered. Joy, however, does not exist in the material world, it is the dominion within our hearts. Existing in a constant position of acquiring and achieving would lead one to a place of dissatisfaction rather than joy.

Joy as a noun is defined by the emotion of great happiness or delight caused by something good or satisfying. In Christianity, joy is believed to be a good feeling in the soul that is produced by the Holy Spirit, or a form of perpetual gladness that is the expression of God’s goodness. This perspective supposes that only those who have such faith can experience joy. I believe that joy exists within all of us regardless of one’s faith. Some spiritual traditions even believe that true and pure joy is achieved at the highest level after death. One thing that I love about our faith is that joy exists in the here and now and can be accessed by anyone. It is a state of bliss that can bring about peace and contentment when fostered and tapped into.

Joy is not just limited to a feeling but exists as an active, intentional choice as well. Choosing and cultivating joy involves daily practices and deliberate rituals. Here are some methods offered by my fellow worship associates: gratitude practices (journaling), meditation, living in harmony with the rhythms of nature, helping others, singing, tending to a garden, sports, concerts, pre-show rituals (in theater), participating in things with which we feel passionate about, and engaging in practices that fulfill a higher calling or purpose such as bringing about change through social justice.

Our church has been a powerful source of joy for me. It has provided me with so many opportunities to exercise and practice that which leads to a greater sense of gratitude, belonging and deep joy. To name just a few of many, I find joy in: sharing worship, growing in a spiritual community, amazing and thought-provoking sermons, social justice, ceremonies, chalice lighting, committee work, covenant groups, potlucks, music, faith formation, caring for our fellow congregants and so much more. As David Steindl-Rast’s quote so fittingly states, “The root of joy is gratefulness. It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.” I am so very grateful for our church!!

I believe joy can exist alongside other emotions such as sadness, grief, and anxiety. In fact, we cannot talk about joy without holding the truth of sorrow too. It is the comparison of one that sheds light on the other. Paradoxically, one may find joy amidst sorrow and sorrow within joy. Perhaps they can sometimes exist as companions. As Curtis Almquist reminds us, “There is some direct relationship between the depth of suffering and the height of joy. That to the extent that we have known suffering, so we can know joy”. Facing our challenges and demons is the very thing that can open the door to personal transformation and resulting joy.
Joy takes time. It is not a quick fix but rather a byproduct of living a savored and grateful life. Joy is something that flows more prominently from the inside out rather than a feeling that results only as a reaction to external events. Living with purposeful intentionality is a holy path to living with abundant joy.

This month’s theme was composed by Jennifer Ryan-Brown and the Worship Associates.

Questions to Explore:

1. How does spirituality bring you joy?
2. What practices bring you joy?
3. Who do you enjoy sharing joy with?
4. How does personal joy differ from shared joy?
5. Where do you experience joy?
6. How can you help foster joy?
7. Are joy and happiness different? How?
8. Can joy be manufactured, or is it spontaneous?
9. How do we experience joy amidst tragedy?
10. What does it mean to have true joy?

Quotes:

We cannot cure the world of sorrows, but we can choose to live in joy. -Joseph Campbell

Let your joy be your journey- not some distant goal. - Tim Cook

The joy that isn’t shared dies young. - Anne Sexton

Find joy in everything you choose to do. Every job, relationship, home….it’s your responsibility to love it, or change it. - Chuck Palahniuk

Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself. - Mahatma Gandhi

Find a place inside where there’s joy, and joy will burn out the pain. Joseph Campbell

Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls. - Mother Teresa

If you carry joy in your heart, you can heal any moment. - Carlos Santana

Participate joyfully in the sorrows of the world. We cannot cure the world of sorrows, but we can choose to live in joy. - Joseph Campbell
Joy is the holy fire that keeps our purpose warm and our intelligence aglow. – Helen Keller

Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy. - Thich Nhat Hanh

There are souls in this world who have the gift of finding joy everywhere and leaving it behind them when they go. - Frederick William Faber

Joy is not in things; it is in us. - Richard Wagner

I define joy as a sustained sense of well-being and internal peace - a connection to what matters. - Oprah Winfrey

The essence of life is not the great victories and grand failures, but in the simple joys. - Jonathan Lockwood Huie

When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves. - Buddha

Sometimes you have to let go of the picture of what you thought it would be like and learn to find joy in the story you are actually living. - Rachel Marie Martin

True devotion does not actually drain us. It is a source of vibrant energy that makes our commitments come alive and become a source of joy. - Mindy Newman

Some people could be given an entire field of roses and only see the thorns in it. Others could be given a single weed and only see the wildflower in it. Perception is the key component to gratitude. And gratitude is a key component of joy. - Amy Weatherly

Gratitude begins in our hearts and then dovetails into behavior. It almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. - Anne Lamott

I sometimes forget that I was created for joy. My mind is too busy. My heart is too heavy, heavy for me to remember that I have been called to dance the sacred dance for life. I was created to smile, to love, to be lifted up and lift others up. O sacred one untangle my feet from all that ensnares. Free my soul that we might dance and that our dancing might be contagious. - Hafiz